What does “globalization” mean in the humanities today? This honors seminar explores the literary, cultural and political dimensions of globalization. Globalization has acquired a contentious set of meanings, defined by historical and economic processes as well as by popular culture and media forms. Popular debates on globalization have posited theories “for” and “against” globalization, frequently equating the term with the expansion of capital markets and a global consumer culture. Globalization is often viewed in opposition to the local or the national. It is frequently defined through spatial metaphors (e.g. the global village, online social networks) or in terms of temporality (e.g. the future of globalization). Globalization is also a category of identity: despite the differences of race, class, gender and sexuality that define us, many academic as well as corporate institutions are invested in notions of the “global citizen.”

In this seminar, we will examine globalization as a principal category of analysis in literary and cultural studies. We will read a variety of texts, including literary criticism and social theory, ethnography and political philosophy, novels and films. This wide range of textual interventions illustrate the ways in which globalization is a multi-dimensional category. As a historical narrative, globalization has its precedents in formations of empire and nation. As an economic process, it is characterized by the uneven distribution of capital across regions of the globe. As a cultural phenomenon, globalization creates possibilities for resistance to the state, as well as for the reproduction of state power.

The objective of this course is to provide you with a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks to approach contemporary discourses of globalization. As a two-unit course, your personal commitment, active participation, and leadership is essential to this class. Each week we will read a series of essays, novels, and films, structuring our discussion around themes and questions of interest to each seminar participant. Since we will be meeting only once a week, each unexcused absence will negatively impact your final grade.